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Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report summarizes the situation of Palestinian women for the period from October 2008 to September 2009, in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2009/14. It reviews the situation of Palestinian women and provides an overview of the assistance provided by entities of the United Nations system with regard to, inter alia, education and training; health; employment and entrepreneurship; women's human rights; violence against women; and humanitarian assistance. The report concludes with recommendations for consideration by the Commission on the Status of Women.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 2009/14 on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women, the Economic and Social Council, concerned about the grave situation of Palestinian women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, requested the Secretary-General to continue to review the situation in order to assist Palestinian women by all available means, including those set out by the Secretary-General in his previous report on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women (E/CN.6/2009/5), and to submit to the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-fourth session a report, including information provided by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution.

2. The present report covers the period from October 2008 to September 2009 and reviews the situation of Palestinian women based on information from United Nations bodies or individuals that monitor the situation of Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. Such bodies and individuals include the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, and the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

3. The report also reflects information submitted by entities of the United Nations system that provide assistance to Palestinian women, including the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat, ESCWA, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

4. The following United Nations entities contributed to the present report through the United Nations country team in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: FAO, ILO, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), UNICEF, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), UNRWA, WFP and WHO.

5. The report provides recommendations on improving the situation of Palestinian women, including through the continued assistance of the United Nations system.

II. Situation of Palestinian women

6. The importance of a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine continued to be emphasized during diplomatic developments and events during the reporting period. The discontinuation of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations undertaken within the framework of the Annapolis process, a destructive conflict in Gaza and a deepening internal divide despite efforts towards Palestinian unity characterized the reporting period. Recent months, however, have witnessed renewed efforts by the international community to achieve the vision of two States living side by side in peace and security (see A/64/351-S/2009/464, para. 5).

7. During the Israeli military operation Cast Lead in December 2008 and January 2009, intense fighting, high numbers of civilian casualties and extensive damage to the civilian infrastructure in Gaza were witnessed (ibid., para. 9). While figures from different sources vary, an estimated 1,300 Palestinians lost their lives and 5,300 were injured in the conflict, and 14 Israelis were killed and more than 530 injured. A majority of the casualties were reportedly civilians, particularly among Palestinians (ibid., para. 13).

8. According to estimates by United Nations agencies, the three-week conflict in Gaza led to the destruction of 3,700 houses and 2 health-care centres and resulted in damage to 48,700 houses, 15 hospitals, 41 health-care centres and 273 schools (ibid., para. 14). A survey of 2,020 households conducted in March 2009,[1] revealed that 40 per cent of women wanting pre- or post-natal care during operation Cast Lead were prevented from access to such care by the security situation.[2] The survey findings noted that a considerable proportion of the Gaza population reported symptoms of distress weeks after Israel had withdrawn its troops and discontinued the operation. A survey on the psychosocial consequences for women[3] showed that they continued to experience extreme fear, even after a truce had been declared and the hostilities had ended.

9. On 6 February 2009, at its forty-third session, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women expressed deep concern about the military engagement, which resulted in heavy civilian casualties and a humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The Committee noted with deep concern that the human rights of women and children, in particular those relating to peace and security, free movement, livelihood and health, had been seriously violated. The Committee urged the parties to the conflict to involve women in the decision-making process on the promotion and maintenance of peace and security at all levels in accordance with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

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[1] Fafo Institute for Applied International Studies, Norway (2009): information from a household sample survey on "Life on the Gaza Strip six weeks after the armed conflict" (December 2008-January 2009), conducted with support from UNFPA and cited in the contributions of UNFPA and the United Nations country team in the Occupied Palestinian Territory to the present report.

[2] Contribution of the United Nations country team in the Occupied Palestinian Territory to the present report.

[3] Culture and Free Thought Association (2009): information from a survey, commissioned by UNFPA on the "Gaza Crisis: psychosocial consequences for women", conducted by the Association, which is a non-governmental organization partner of UNFPA in Gaza, and cited in the contribution of the United Nations country team in the Occupied Palestinian Territory to the present report.

10. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the continuation of the blockade that was imposed by Israel in June 2007 has triggered a protracted crisis with humanitarian consequences. The living conditions of women and men in Gaza deteriorated as a result of the erosion of livelihoods and the gradual decline of infrastructure, including basic services for health, water and sanitation, and education.[4]

11. Although restrictions of movement affect both women and men, concerns over possible harassment at checkpoints have curtailed women's movement, reducing their access to education, economic participation and social inclusion. This had a particularly negative impact on the access of women heads of household to employment opportunities.[5] A World Bank study noted that the high transaction and financial costs of transport as a result of unpredictable and often protracted waiting times had a disproportionate impact on women.[5] Recent measures by the Government of Israel to ease restrictions in certain places in the West Bank are expected to have a significant impact on the freedom of movement and economic development of the Palestinians, if these measures are sustained and expanded (A/64/351-S/2009/464, para. 26).

12. House demolitions resulting from the requirement for building permits by the Israeli authorities in East Jerusalem and in some parts of the West Bank have continued in the past year. A total of 51,000 people in Gaza were internally displaced and are now living in makeshift shelters that provide minimal protection. Others fled to the homes of friends and relatives.[6] The negative impacts on families who are displaced include the significant deterioration of social and financial conditions, including long-term trauma, family separation, disruption of family life and education, as well as increased poverty.[4] Women are particularly affected by the displacement and the lack of security.

13. According to the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories (A/64/339), women are particularly affected by the occupation and Israeli settlement policy. During its field mission to Egypt, Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic, the Committee was presented with a number of cases illustrating that Palestinian women, as a result of fear of harassment at checkpoints or by settlers, increasingly felt unable to provide for their families or were afraid to move outside the boundaries of their communities.

14. The ongoing conflict continued to have a negative impact on the economic environment. In 2008, the consumer price index rose by 9.89 per cent on average in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and by 13.98 per cent in Gaza. At the same time, the average rise in food prices in the two areas was more than 17 per cent and 21 per cent, respectively. In early 2009, the rate of price increases slowed down, but prices remained

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[4] Contribution of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to the present report.

[5] World Bank, "Towards enhancing women's mobility in the West Bank", *West Bank and Gaza Update* (July 2009).

[6] Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Field Update from the Humanitarian Coordinator, 9 February 2009, and the Gaza Flash Appeal, 2 February 2009; Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, press release 6/2009 of 12 March 2009, cited in A/HRC/10/20, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied since 1967, Richard Falk.

high.[7] Despite increases in the import of goods into Gaza since the military operation ended, the level of imports still remains at less than one fifth of what the volume was prior to the imposition of the comprehensive closure regime in May 2007, and imports are mainly food and sanitation items (A/64/351-S/2009/464, para. 16).

15. According to the most recent estimates, the poverty rate among households headed by women was 61.2 per cent, compared with 56.9 per cent for households headed by men in the Occupied Palestinian Territory in 2007. The poverty rate among female-headed households with seven or more children was 79.7 per cent, compared with 68.6 per cent for households with five or six children (A/64/77-E/2009/13).

16. Over half of the Palestinian population of working age is between 15 and 29 years of age. Those who have the possibility to complete secondary education face limited job prospects. Over half of those in the 15 to 29 age group do not have access to education or employment.[8] In the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the rate of participation in the labour force for young women is estimated to be below 13.6 per cent, compared with 54 per cent for young men, for the first quarter of 2009.[9]

17. During the reporting period, the rates of women's participation in the labour force remained low at 15.4 per cent (16.5 per cent in the West Bank and 13.5 per cent in Gaza), compared with a participation rate for men of 66.9 per cent (68.5 per cent in the West Bank and 63.8 per cent in Gaza).[9] The majority of women in the labour force have little or no education, and their low participation rates can be attributed to sociocultural restrictions, high fertility rates, and a general low level of employment caused by the various constraints imposed by the ongoing occupation on the economy.[2] Women who are employed are concentrated in the farming, forestry, hunting and fishing sectors (34.8 per cent), followed by education (32.5 per cent) and health services (7.2 per cent).[9]

18. While there has been a continuing increase in the number of married women in the labour force over the past seven years, unmarried women comprise the majority of the female labour force. According to research conducted jointly by the Birzeit Women's Studies Institute and the World Bank, higher education is a major factor for employment among both married and unmarried women. During the reporting period, the probability that a woman would join the labour market increased 18 times if she had a high school degree and a full 37 times if she had a postgraduate degree.[10]

19. Nearly 90 per cent of women in the informal economy work in the agricultural sector.[11] According to FAO, women farmers face dwindling household incomes due to high input prices, and have to buy food at higher prices. Most small-holder

[7] International Labour Organization, report of the Director-General to the International Labour Conference at its 98th session, appendix on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories, para. 91.

[8] International Labour Organization, op. cit., preface.

[9] Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Labour Force Survey (January-March 2009) Round (Q1/2009).

[10] Women's Studies Institute/World Bank (June 2009), "The impact of Israeli mobility restrictions and violence on gender in Palestinian society 2000-2007".

[11] World Health Organization, report by the secretariat on the health conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory, including east Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan dated 7 May 2009 (A/62/24, annex, para. 5).

farmers also face obstacles in marketing their agricultural products owing to the inundation of Israeli imports into the Palestinian economy and the restrictions of movement and access to goods. Families in some areas face additional vulnerabilities owing to drought and the high price of tanked water. As a result of the loss of grazing lands owing to settlement expansion, the barrier and closed military zones, herding communities are particularly afflicted with high fodder prices.[5]

20. According to a World Bank assessment of restrictions on Palestinian water sector development, women surveyed in a small village in the West Bank in 2008-2009 complained about poor water quality. The proximity of many wells to sewage sources led to water-related health problems and increased work in treating water for household use.[12]

21. A total of 40.4 per cent of 3,767,126 Palestinians currently live with food insecurity.[13] The 2009 socio-economic and food security survey report on the West Bank found that 31 per cent of female-headed households were food insecure, compared with 24 per cent of male-headed households.[14] In the West Bank, the food insecurity prevalence among households with more than 50 per cent women is 29 per cent, compared with the 25 per cent West Bank average.[2] According to the World Bank, Palestinian families are forced to reduce their consumption and change their diets because of higher food prices.[12] Preliminary findings from a survey conducted in Gaza in May and June 2009 showed that 68 per cent of female-headed households were food insecure, compared with 60 per cent of male-headed households. Food insecurity in Gaza was estimated to have increased by 4 per cent from May 2008.[2] The survey also revealed that a higher number of women and girls in a household increases the likelihood of food insecurity in the household.

22. The rise in food insecurity and poverty in Gaza has resulted in an increased burden on women.[2] In the event of the death, disability or unemployment of the husband, women become the main breadwinners for the family. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported an increased number of single-parent households. Older women, women with disabilities, women heads of household and displaced women and girls faced continued hardship as a result of the ongoing blockade of Gaza.[4] Approximately 20 per cent of households claim that boys' needs are prioritized when there is a food shortage at home, while the least likely household members to receive priority during a food shortage are the elderly.[2]

23. Education is undermined as a result of the blockade, with the delivery of essential educational materials being delayed or denied entry at crossing points. Most educational facilities have not been repaired owing to the lack of building materials. Many schools are running on double shifts to accommodate the large number of students.[15]

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[12] World Bank (2009), Assessment of restrictions on Palestinian water sector development, Middle East and North Africa Region, Sustainable Development, Washington, D.C.

[13] Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Consolidated Appeals Process 2010 (forthcoming).

[14] FAO, Socio-Economic and Food Security Survey Report on the West Bank, carried out jointly by FAO, WFP and the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, August 2009.

[15] Gisha Legal Centre for Freedom of Movement, "Obstacle course: students denied exit from Gaza, July 2009, cited in the contribution of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to the report.

24. In the 2008/09 academic year, a total of 239,188 girls, 49.92 per cent of pupils, were enrolled in UNRWA elementary, preparatory and secondary schools. The drop-out rate for girls was 0.97 per cent, and 66.8 per cent of the students benefiting from UNRWA administered scholarships were girls.[16]

25. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, in 2008, 9.1 per cent of women 15 years and older were illiterate, compared with only 2.9 per cent of men.[17]

26. Recent data on education indicate that women constituted 45.2 per cent of those who had completed two years or more of higher education; 54 per cent of students at local universities; 57 per cent of students at university colleges; and 37 per cent at community colleges in 2007.[18] Tertiary students have limited postgraduate study options within Gaza and face great difficulties in arranging to study abroad at the postgraduate level.[15] This has hindered progress in improving girls' and women's education, thus limiting their potential to assume leadership positions at all levels.[4] Even though women accounted for 58 per cent of graduates from local universities, they represented only 16.6 per cent of academic teaching staff at universities.[18]

27. UNICEF reported that adolescent Palestinian girls continued to have limited opportunities for development, recreation and participation, with few safe spaces available to them. Youth clubs across the Occupied Palestinian Territory had insufficient funding and were poorly equipped and managed. Adolescent girls' opportunities were often compromised by the burden of unpaid domestic work or pressure to marry early.[2]

28. The closure regime, including the barrier, checkpoints, closures and earth mounds, restricts Palestinian women's access to adequate prenatal, natal and post-natal medical care.[19] During the operation Cast Lead, maternal and child health services at primary health-care centres were disrupted. Despite the critical conditions, maternity assistance for normal deliveries continued to be provided, as was specialized health care for obstetric and neonatal complications. In many cases, however, such services were provided in improvised settings within health facilities whose maternity wards and operating theatres had been transformed into trauma units. Findings from a UNFPA assessment in February 2009 suggest that there was a 31 per cent increase in the number in miscarriages at four hospitals surveyed and a 50 per cent increase in neonatal mortality at one of the hospitals in Gaza City.[20]

29. The sixty-second World Health Assembly expressed deep concern at the serious implications for pregnant women and patients arising from the restriction of movement imposed by Israel on the movement of Palestinian ambulances and medical personnel, and demanded that Israel, the occupying power, improve the

[16] Contribution of UNRWA to the present report.

[17] Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "On the Eve of International Population Day", 11 July 2009.

[18] Contribution of ESCWA to the present report.

[19] See A/HRC/10/35, report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the issue of Palestinian pregnant women giving birth at Israeli checkpoints.

[20] See UNFPA, Gaza crisis: impact on reproductive health and obstetric care, February 2009, cited in the contribution of the United Nations country team in the Occupied Palestinian Territory to the present report.

living and medical conditions of Palestinian detainees, in particular children and women patients.[21]

30. A UNIFEM study[22] highlighted a high prevalence of domestic violence and violence against children, with displaced women being identified at increased risk of gender-based violence.[23] Although precise figures of violent crimes committed against women, including so-called "honour killings", are not available, organizations that provide protection services for victims of violence continued to report such cases in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. During the period from January to August 2009, at least 10 women were reported to have been killed as a consequence of so-called "honour" crimes.[24] Perpetrators enjoy relative impunity for those crimes and are often sentenced to less than three years of imprisonment and serve about two years of the sentence.

31. According to the UNIFEM study,[22] domestic violence was cited as the primary safety problem facing women and girls, while public and political violence was the main safety and security problem facing men and boys. The highest reported rise in domestic violence against women was among households displaced by the conflict and in the southern Gaza Strip, which also had the highest reporting of increased domestic violence against children. The study further highlighted that violence against men was more likely to be treated as a public crime, while violence against women was often treated as a private family problem. Men were 10 times more likely to report the crime to the police than women. Limited legal and public mechanisms were available to men and women victims of social and political violence in Gaza, and there was distrust of the available mechanisms.

32. The Palestinian Authority has taken measures to increase women's participation in all aspects of public and political life.[22] However, women are rarely present in decision-making positions in peace negotiations, either at the national or international level. As a result of the quota established in 2004, women's political participation increased to 12.7 per cent in the Legislative Council and to 18 per cent in the local and municipal councils.[25]

33. According to the Palestinian Authority, women comprised 37 per cent of the employees in the Government sector and 15 per cent of senior employees in Government departments. Out of 15 ministers 5 are women, and they constitute 4.3 per cent of deputy ministers, 5.4 per cent of ambassadors, 10 per cent of judges and 16.9 per cent of lawyers.[2]

34. The Palestinian Authority endorsed the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on 9 March 2009. It is expected that gender equality legislation will be prepared to ensure the implementation of the Convention.[25] In June 2009, the Palestinian Authority, through its Council of Ministers, issued a decision requesting all governmental departments to prepare gender-sensitive annual budgets.[2]

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[21] See WHA62/2009/REC/1, World Health Organization, Report of the Sixty-Second World Health Assembly, Geneva.

[22] UNIFEM, Voicing the Needs of Women and Men in Gaza: Beyond the Aftermath of the 23-Day Israeli Military Operations (2009).

[23] The study was based on a household survey of 1,100 adult men and women conducted across the Gaza Strip in the first week of March 2009.

[24] Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights, member of the World Organization against Torture SOS-Torture Network, August 2009, cited in the contribution of the United Nations country team in the Occupied Palestinian Territory to the present report.

[25] Contribution of the Palestinian Authority to the Beijing+15 review.

III. Assistance to Palestinian women

35. The present section focuses on the assistance provided to Palestinian women by entities of the United Nations system. Based on contributions from United Nations entities, seven areas of support were identified: education and training; health; employment and entrepreneurship; women's human rights; violence against women; humanitarian assistance; and gender mainstreaming.

A. Education and training

36. Women's and girls' access to education and the availability of career guidance, training and recreational opportunities are key elements to their economic empowerment and well-being. UNICEF and UNESCO supported the Ministries of Education and Higher Education and the Ministry of Labour, as well as non-governmental organizations within the Occupied Palestinian Territory, to enhance access to and quality of girls' education and to provide career guidance. UNICEF increased the number of centres in the West Bank and Gaza Strip that provide adolescent-friendly services and education to girls from 69 in 2008 to 133 in 2009. In total, around 60,000 adolescent girls and boys have participated in activities and services provided at those centres, with girls' participation reaching 53 per cent. UNESCO proposed policy options for the development of a comprehensive and holistic career guidance system, based on its report entitled "Career Guidance in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: Mapping the Field and Ways Forward".

37. Evidence has shown that girls' access to education may be dependent on the available infrastructure. WHO constructed sanitary units and instituted hygiene campaigns at 20 girls schools in the West Bank for about 9,000 students. UNIFEM and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education created a "healthy canteen" pilot project in 61 different schools throughout the West Bank that provided healthy snacks, with the aim of improving the health and nutritional status of schoolchildren.

38. Technical and vocational education remains a critical factor in women's access to the labour market. Training programmes for women were provided in a wide range of areas related to vocational and professional development. The UNRWA Department of Education continued to assist Palestinian refugees in acquiring professional skills. During the reporting period, a total of 2,670 girls benefited from the UNRWA Technical and Vocational Education and Training programme. UN-Habitat, through its Special Human Settlements Programme for the Palestinian People, is in the process of establishing a technical and vocational training centre in Hebron for underprivileged women.

B. Health

39. United Nations entities supported improved access to health services, including reproductive health, psychological counselling, health education and prevention programmes. WHO monitored restrictions that prevent women from accessing health services outside the Gaza Strip. Information was collected on women who were denied the right to leave Gaza and related deaths. According to

WHO, 51 women and girls died during the period from October 2007 and August 2009 while waiting to receive medical treatment that was only available outside Gaza. WHO assisted UNFPA in providing clearances for medicines and equipment in order to provide services for women of childbearing age.

40. Several United Nations entities provided capacity-building on improving the provision of health care. WHO provided technical support to the Palestinian Red Crescent Society Maternity Hospital and the Makassed Hospital, the largest specialized hospitals providing obstetric care for Palestinian women. UNFPA targeted all Ministry of Health maternity workers in a capacity-building programme.

41. The provision of reproductive and maternal health care was supported by United Nations entities. During the reporting period, UNRWA provided antenatal care to approximately 102,000 pregnant women, post-natal care to more than 89,000 women and family planning services to about 133,000 clients in five fields of operation. UNICEF supported the Ministry of Health through providing essential equipment for newborns and basic obstetric equipment for 4,000 high-risk newborns and 7,500 pregnant women in 13 neonatal units. In partnership with non-governmental organizations working on health issues, UNFPA supplied 20 remote communities in the West Bank with basic reproductive health and obstetric care as well as health education programmes. Over a six-month period, UNICEF provided micronutrients and fortified biscuits for 80,000 children and 40,000 pregnant women.

42. A number of United Nations entities provided psychosocial counselling to women. WHO introduced a community approach to improving the situation of mental health workers, their clients and the family members of the mentally ill. The UNRWA Community Mental Health Programme in the West Bank and Gaza Strip offered essential psychosocial support for Palestine refugees, including women and girls. Psychosocial support was provided by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs through individual and group counselling to family members of female prisoners held in Israeli jails and to former prisoners in support of their reintegration in the society.

43. Disease prevention through immunizations, mammograms and healthy lifestyle guides was the focus of a number of United Nations entities. UNRWA continued to provide full immunization coverage of women and children against vaccine-preventable diseases, provided pre-conception folic acid, and iron and folic acid supplements for women throughout pregnancy. Health education programmes on the prevention of tobacco use and the prevention of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases were established. UNFPA supported four women's health centres, which provided clinical, psychosocial and legal support, physiotherapy and health education to women living in the most populated and underprivileged areas of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. WHO and WFP instituted programmes to improve nutritional and health behaviours.

C. Employment and entrepreneurship

44. Access to job opportunities supports women's self-reliance and ensures their livelihoods. In August 2009, UNESCO, UNIFEM, UNDP and FAO began implementation of the joint programme on "Culture and Development in the Occupied Palestinian Territory", a three-year programme which promotes

institutional development through policies and practices for safeguarding cultural heritage, and socio-economic development through ecotourism and arts and crafts. To improve women's access to opportunities in the labour market, UNRWA recruited women as teachers, doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, field workers, administrative staff, site engineers, school cleaners and agricultural labourers. In collaboration with Palestinian non-governmental organizations, skills training was provided to more than 10,000 women in areas such as computer literacy, hairdressing, sewing, traditional Palestinian handicrafts and embroidery. Through its emergency job creation programme, UNRWA continued to offer short-term employment opportunities to families without a breadwinner in a range of skilled, unskilled and professional positions. UN-Habitat completed the design and initial documents for a project for a housing and income-generating programme for poor women in Hebron, which aims to improve the living conditions of poor women and their families through the construction of 100 housing units and the establishment of small-scale enterprise activities for generating income in Hebron.

45. Credit to women microentrepreneurs constitutes a fundamental source of capital that enables them to meet the needs of their families for food, clothing, health care and education. Several United Nations entities provided grants and training to enhance Palestinian women's entrepreneurship. IFAD provided assistance to Palestinian women through credit and savings schemes in its Rehabilitation and Development Project Phase II, benefiting 8,200 households. The Deprived Families Economic Empowerment Programme of UNDP focused on capacity-building and economic empowerment by supporting 2,210 poor entrepreneurs to develop their own business enterprises. Nearly half of those entrepreneurs are women who did not qualify for commercial loans. By July 2009, the UNRWA Microfinance and Microenterprise Programme had made loans to small-scale enterprises in Gaza and the West Bank, to women in Gaza through a solidarity group lending product, to microenterprises in Gaza and the West Bank and to workers and low-paid professionals. The UNRWA Small and Microenterprise Training Programme provided short-term training customized for the needs of microentrepreneurs and small business owners in the Gaza Strip. During the reporting period, more than 618 courses and 18 workshops were conducted for over 13,453 participants, almost 20 per cent of whom were women.

46. Efforts were made to enhance the role of Palestinian women in the improvement of national food security and agricultural production. UNDP organized tailored vocational training and business courses for women and provided women with assets such as livestock, home gardens and greenhouses to produce goods for their own consumption or for sale on the local market. Agricultural projects supported by FAO targeted women in income-generating and capacity-building activities through backyard production and home gardening, mainly in areas affected by drought or conflict and/or in Bedouin communities. A total of 650 female-headed households currently receive assistance in Nablus, Dorah, Tulkarem and Gaza. The WFP Food For Training and Food For Work programmes involved 14,376 women (49 per cent of beneficiaries) in home gardening, handicrafts, food processing, animal raising, beekeeping, agricultural awareness, soap making, and embroidery in the West Bank. UNDP supported the Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees to provide economic assistance to more than 5,000 members of a women's cooperative in the West Bank. The initiative is now run in 132 locations in the West Bank and Gaza.

47. A 2008/09 School Snacks project run by WFP focused on the empowerment and capacity-building of women, with approximately 140 of them receiving cash for work and monthly rations of wheat flour for the production of snacks. UNIFEM piloted a school feeding initiative with the Nusseirat Women's Programme Centre targeting 450 children in kindergartens in the Nusseirat refugee camp.

48. ILO participated in the review of the Palestinian National Development Plan to promote a longer-term perspective on achieving decent work and social justice for both women and men.

49. Efforts were made to increase women's equal access to and knowledge of communications and information technologies. UNESCO implemented a two-year project on Strengthening Palestinian Participatory Democracy and Public Dialogue, financed by the United Nations Democracy Fund, which aimed to increase women's participation in democratic decision-making, public debate and media through strengthening the outreach and advocacy capacities of women's organizations and women journalists.

D. Women's human rights

50. Capacity-building efforts also focused on the promotion of women's rights. In December 2008, OHCHR, in cooperation with the Palestinian Authority's Independent Commission for Human Rights, organized a training course on "Rights of women and juveniles in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice". The activity targeted 14 Palestinian prosecutors from the West Bank, focusing on the role of prosecutors in the protection of women's and juveniles' rights in the process of administration of justice. In the Gaza Strip, OHCHR provided training to a group of female lawyers on protecting human rights as part of its training-of-trainers programme. The training aimed at developing human rights expertise and training capacities. OHCHR conducted a workshop on basic human rights and the rights of people with disabilities in the Gaza Strip for a group of mothers of children with disabilities. During the reporting period, OHCHR held several meetings with Palestinian institutions on the issue of so-called "honour killings".

51. A number of awareness-raising campaigns on the human rights of women and girls were organized by United Nations entities. OHCHR, ESCWA and UNRWA conducted training sessions and workshops on awareness-raising on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. ESCWA held its second regional workshop on implementation of the Convention for parliamentarians in Beirut in November 2008. On the occasion of International Women's Day 2009, OHCHR organized an event for 24 representatives of local women's rights non-governmental organizations in the West Bank, addressing the United Nations protection mechanisms and women's rights in international law and under Palestinian legislation. The discussion focused on the main causes of violence against women and the role of men in protecting women's rights.

52. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs conducted advocacy and media campaigns to raise the awareness of the general public, key individuals and organizations at the international level of the conditions of female prisoners in Israeli prisons and detention centres. UNIFEM provided legal and social support to Palestinian female prisoners and detainees in Israeli prisons. In particular, prisoners whose family members were unable to visit them have received monthly visits from

lawyers. Two support groups for released female prisoners were established in the West Bank. A three-day summer camp was held for former prisoners and for relatives and children of current and former prisoners. In the Gaza Strip, a training course on "Oral history documentation skills" targeting former female prisoners was conducted with the goal to collect stories about their imprisonment.

53. In an effort to engage youth, UNIFEM continued to support the Youth Rights Monitor project, implemented by a local non-governmental organization, is specialized in media and youth. The project, targeting young people between the ages of 14 and 25, institutionalizes the participation of Palestinian youth in national public policy dialogue and debate, with a special focus on the rights of youth, including women's rights.

54. UNRWA partnered with 103 Palestinian community-based organizations, including 65 women's programme centres, to develop capacity for the implementation of social services for vulnerable people, including women. Programmes focused on increasing women's economic self-reliance; expanding women's role in managing community-based organizations; and promoting refugee women's knowledge of human rights.

55. In support of the sixtieth anniversary of UNRWA, the Department of Public Information assisted with the translation and printing of public information materials on issues affecting the women refugee population. More than 300,000 visitors to United Nations Headquarters saw the exhibit on the theme "The Palestinians — 60 years of struggle and enduring hope", which was on display from November 2008 to January 2009 and portrayed Palestinian life, including several dozen images of women and their daily life, under occupation.

E. Violence against women

56. Within the framework of the Secretary-General's multi-year campaign on the theme "UNite to End Violence against Women", UNIFEM led the Combating Violence Against Women festival in Ramallah during the annual campaign, "16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence", which took place from 25 November to 10 December 2009. The event was supported by eight United Nations entities, the Ministries of Women's Affairs, Social Affairs and the Interior as well as Al Muntada, a coalition of 15 local non-governmental organizations committed to ending violence against women. The festival highlighted the collaborative work performed by United Nations entities, local non-governmental organizations and the Ministries to end violence against women, with a focus on youth groups.

57. Several United Nations entities were instrumental in increasing services to survivors of domestic violence. UNIFEM supported the upgrading of an existing toll-free helpline for women and children victims of violence. The helpline expanded its working hours, provided a social worker in the Gaza Strip to directly follow up with people requesting help and provided funding for a physician to respond to medical queries. UNFPA, in cooperation with the Nablus, Jenin and Jericho municipalities, continued to provide psychosocial counselling to women and worked with local non-governmental organizations to improve measures for women to access services that address gender-based violence. The UNRWA Gaza and West Bank field offices continued to hold individual and group counselling sessions for

victims of gender-based violence who are in need of therapeutic services through the Community Mental Health Programme. During the reporting period, 6,321 women benefited from counselling through the programme.

58. UNIFEM worked with the Ministry of Interior to strengthen the Palestinian institutional capacity to combat violence against women through developing guidelines and procedures for security forces, including police officers assigned to Family Protection Units. Through a local non-governmental organization, UNIFEM supported two intensive training courses targeting 40 security force members (men and women) from the West Bank as part of efforts to promote community responses to working with survivors of gender-based violence.

59. In partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs, UNIFEM continued to work with the Mehwar Centre, an anti-violence institution in the Occupied Palestinian Territory that provides multiple services to survivors of gender-based violence. This pilot institution works with the community on prevention of violence and the protection and empowerment of women and children victims. It lobbies for the adoption of relevant national policies and laws. During the reporting period, the Mehwar Centre sheltered 62 women and 8 child victims of violence. Four new cases per month, on average, were received. The Centre provided a variety of services, including counselling, psychological support, legal advice and representation, and, in coordination with other local organizations, health care, vocational training, and educational and job opportunities.

60. United Nations entities participated in advocacy activities and efforts to raise awareness about violence against women. UNIFEM promoted an event to increase the sensitivity and the commitment of youth to decreasing incidences of domestic violence through the medium of hip hop music. UNRWA organized awareness-raising sessions on the theme "Women and men united to end violence against women and girls". The sessions were attended by 782 members of the community and 213 staff and addressed topics such as sex education, equality of men and women in the family, and violence against women and children.

F. Humanitarian assistance

61. A number of United Nations entities responded to the destructive military conflict of December 2008 and January 2009 with emergency assistance, in addition to their ongoing humanitarian assistance. In January 2009, WFP launched an emergency operation to provide assistance to households headed by women, widows, and divorced or separated women, among other vulnerable groups. Female-headed households comprised approximately half of the total beneficiaries assisted by WFP in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. UNRWA sheltered more than 50,000 persons in 50 of its schools across Gaza, where they received food, water, blankets, mattresses, hygiene kits and medical care from the Agency and from local and international non-governmental organizations. UNHCR provided non-food items for 3,200 families (around 18,000 persons) to be distributed by UNRWA to the population in Gaza. UNDP disbursed $20 million through its emergency cash assistance programme to people who had suffered partial or total damage to personal property during the offensive, 952 of which beneficiaries (7 per cent) were women.

62. In the West Bank, United Nations entities continued to provide emergency assistance programmes, including food aid, to around 70,000 refugee families

during 2009. UNHCR supplied non-food items, such as plastic sheeting, sanitary napkins, diapers, blankets and logistical equipment.

63. In August 2009, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs issued its Special Focus report detailing the humanitarian impact of two years of blockade on the Gaza Strip, including a section on the effects of operation Cast Lead on women in Gaza. Based on a large-scale public opinion survey of 1,815 households in Gaza, a UNDP report entitled "Inside Gaza: attitudes and perceptions of the Gaza Strip residents in the aftermath of the Israeli military operations" (March 2009) provides data disaggregated by sex on the impact of the crisis on women and men.

64. In accordance with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, the Inter-Agency Gender Task Force of the United Nations country team, led by UNIFEM and the Gender Standby Capacity Project Adviser, issued the report entitled, "Voicing the needs of women and men in Gaza: beyond the 23-day Israeli military operation" in April 2009. Based on a gender needs assessment, the report provided information on gender equality issues addressed in humanitarian/early recovery assistance, during and after the Israeli military operation.

65. UNIFEM and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs developed a guidebook for the humanitarian sector in Gaza that provides standards for the integration of gender equality issues from the outset of complex emergencies. The guidebook aims to enable humanitarian service providers to reach their target audience with the maximum positive effect while minimizing exacerbation or inadvertent exposure to risk.

G. Gender mainstreaming

66. A number of United Nations entities initiated activities to strengthen gender mainstreaming in policies and programmes. In 2008, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and UNIFEM jointly deployed a Gender Standby Capacity Project Adviser to provide technical support on gender mainstreaming within humanitarian action, in particular with regard to five sectors: water and sanitation; health; protection; job creation; and cash assistance. As a result, the 2009 Consolidated Appeals Process projects showed an increase in commitment and technical capacity from individual United Nations agencies and members of an umbrella organization of international NGOs regarding the incorporation of gender equality perspectives into programmes. In addition, the United Nations Inter-Agency Gender Task Force strengthened its terms of reference and its participation in sector coordination. The visibility of gender issues increased in sectoral responses.

67. In May 2009, UNIFEM, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNRWA and ILO began implementation of a joint programme under the Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund on "Gender equality and women's empowerment in the Occupied Palestinian Territory". This three-year joint programme promotes Palestinian women's social, economic and political empowerment and aims to reduce gender-based violence, increase the representation of women in decision-making bodies, increase the adoption of policies and laws on gender equality issues in decision-making bodies, and enhance opportunities for women's economic empowerment.

68. ESCWA provided technical cooperation and advisory services to the Palestinian Ministry for Women's Affairs on gender mainstreaming and strategic planning. Institutions of the Palestinian Authority participated in meetings and workshops aimed at building the capacity of Palestinian national mechanisms for gender equality.

69. ILO and UNDP contributed to the development of the Palestinian National Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan for Gaza (2009-2010), prepared by the Palestinian Authority. This report highlighted that women and men in Gaza do not face challenges in the same way but have different capacities and access to support systems through which to manage situations of stress.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

70. **During the period under review, despite some positive developments, the overall humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory continued to deteriorate in most areas. The rise in food insecurity and poverty has resulted in an increased burden on women to maintain household food security. The continued closures, checkpoints and roadblocks limited the access of Palestinian women and girls to health-care services, education and employment. Pregnant women had difficulties accessing health services for antenatal care and safe delivery.**

71. **Improving the situation of and enhancing the impact of assistance to Palestinian women is linked to the achievement of a secure and lasting peace. Renewed efforts need to be made by the international community to seek an end to the violent confrontations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and a peaceful resolution to the conflict. Women should be fully involved in the conflict resolution and peacebuilding initiatives to be undertaken in the region, in accordance with the Beijing Platform for Action and Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009) and 1889 (2009) on women, peace and security.**

72. **United Nations entities should continue to provide assistance to women and girls in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and refugee camps, particularly in areas such as education, health, social welfare, employment and women's economic empowerment. Attention should be paid, however, to ensure that assistance programmes and projects do not inadvertently reinforce conventional divisions of labour according to gender and gender stereotypes. Enhanced efforts should be made to achieve women's full participation in political and economic decision-making processes at all levels. Concrete actions are needed to increase the participation of Palestinian women, in particular young women, in the labour force. Attention should be given to increasing access by Palestinian women to safe and affordable means of transport.**

73. **Food security should be made a high priority. Strong, comprehensive measures, including safety nets, are needed to ensure that women have access to safe, adequate, nutritious and affordable food, and to increase the access by women small-holder farmers to technologies, credit and markets.**

74. **Enhanced efforts are needed to eliminate all forms of violence against Palestinian women and girls and to protect and promote their human rights,**

including through the systematic and effective implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Incidents of discrimination and violence against women and girls, including so-called "honour killings", should be strongly condemned. Perpetrators of all forms of violence against women should be prosecuted, and any climate of impunity surrounding such offences should be eliminated. Renewed efforts by all relevant actors are needed at the international, regional and national levels to prevent sexual violence against women, in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions.

75. **A gender perspective should be fully integrated into international assistance programmes, through, inter alia, gender analysis and the collection of sex-disaggregated data. All studies and reports undertaken by the United Nations, including the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied since 1967, should systematically incorporate information on the situation of women and girls.**

76. **Governments, academic institutions, international organizations and civil society, including non-governmental organizations, should be encouraged to collaborate on qualitative and quantitative action-oriented research on the situation of women and girls.**

77. **Member States, entities of the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations and other relevant stakeholders should intensify their efforts to provide financial and technical assistance to Palestinian women and girls and systematically assess and report on the impact of those efforts.**